Playing with Words and Rhythms in *Khālī jagah:*

Translating a Hindi Novel and its Texture into French

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The novel *Khālī jagah* (2006) by the Hindi writer Geetanjali Shree mainly focuses on the topics of violence, loss, and quest for identity in the contemporary world. In this text – and in others too, but maybe here more than elsewhere – the author makes use of a very hybrid and idiomatic Hindi. Moreover, she repeatedly plays with iterations and alliterations, assonances and consonances, onomatopoeias and neologisms, and creates a particular syntax that might be described as dismembered, dislocated, and breathless. To these elements must also be added the inclusion of excerpts from folk songs as well as the essential role played by silences and unsaid things. If all these features are to be taken into account when translating such a narrative – as its content is tightly coupled to its form – it makes for a highly complex and challenging task.

After providing a very brief summary of *Khālī jagah*, I will first highlight a few rhythmic and translation related issues, before analysing in detail some excerpts from the novel, in order to explain the choices I have made for its French translation (*Une place vide*, Infolio, 2018) and compare some of the results with an English translation primarily focused on the content (*The Empty Space*, Harper Perennial, 2011).

1. Introduction and presentation of the novel

The novel *Khālī jagah* (2006) by the Hindi writer Geetanjali Shree[1] mainly focuses on the topics of violence, loss, and quest for identity in the contemporary world. In this text – and in others too, but maybe here more than elsewhere – the author makes use of a very hybrid and idiomatic Hindi. Moreover, she repeatedly plays with iterations and alliterations, assonances and consonances, onomatopoeias and neologisms, and creates a particular syntax that might be

[1] Geetanjali Shree was born Geetanjali Pandey in Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh, in 1957, but chose to be called by her mother's family name (Shree) once she started writing fiction. So far, she has published five novels in Hindi: *Māī* (1993), *Hamārā śahar us bars* (1998), *Tirohit* (2001), *Khālī jagah* (2006), and *Ret-samādhi* (2018). She has also published several collections of short stories and worked for the theatre. She began her career as a literary historian, and published her PhD research on Premchand, titled *Between Two Worlds: An Intellectual Biography of Premchand* (1989). The English translation of *Māī* contributed to her fame as a global author, and her works were translated into several European and Asian languages. She is the recipient of several literary awards and is regularly invited abroad for writer residencies and conferences. She brings an original voice to contemporary Hindi literature through the use of a very personal, experimental syntax and lexicon, making her writing dense and complex.

described as dismembered, dislocated, and breathless. To these elements we should add the inclusion of excerpts from folk songs as well as the essential role played by silences and unsaid things. If all these features are to be taken into account when translating such a narrative – as its content is tightly coupled to its form – it makes for a highly complex and challenging task. After providing a very brief summary of *Khālī jagah* (henceforth KhJ), I will first highlight a few rhythmic and translation-related issues, before analysing in detail some excerpts from the novel, in order to explain the choices I have made for its French translation (*Une place vide*, Infolio, 2018) and compare some of the results with an English translation primarily focused on the content (*The Empty Space*, Harper Perennial, 2011).

The novel begins in an unspecified university cafeteria where a bomb explodes, killing nineteen people, presumably future students.[2] Among them is a young boy aged eighteen who had come to register for his studies. The boy's name is not mentioned and the narrator speaks of him as *vah* ('he'). His body, or rather the ashes and fragments that remain after the explosion, are returned to his parents in a box by the government. In a symbolic exchange for the lost son, a small three-year-old child is given up for adoption to the grieving parents. This little boy was also present in the cafeteria during the explosion but was miraculously spared by the bomb – he was hidden in a small, empty place (*khālī jagah*), hence the title of the novel. It is the story of this little boy adopted by the family that is narrated in the book; or more precisely, it is the child himself, once he turns twenty or so, who tells the story, acting as the first-person narrator looking back at this dramatic event and what followed.

The main theme of the novel lies in the uncertainty and confusion linked to the identity of the two boys. The eighty-seven chapters of the book are focused on the gap between the central role played by the little boy as a narrator and his unsettled position in the family as a substitute for the dead son. Everything he does is compared by the parents and their community to what the lost son did. Throughout his childhood he is unable to establish his own identity in the family, and even, as he reaches eighteen, he decides to study at the same university the dead son had intended to. For his new parents, but for him too, his life, his deeds, his mere presence, everything remains symbolic: the place he occupies in the family is neither his own nor the dead son's. Nothing seems concrete, nothing looks or feels real, not even the bombing! The turning point comes with the arrival of a girl, who we come to understand as the person to whom the

[2] Parts of this summary are taken from Pozza (2016).

narrative is addressing and who appears to be the ex-girlfriend of the deceased son. It is through her, and her patient listening, that the adopted son recovers the will to speak and the desire to assert himself in response to his hitherto insignificant role. The potential of life suddenly becomes apparent to him – although the end of the novel offers another perspective. This novel, therefore, deals above all with the question of identity, of the violence of an unstable identity, and of exile and nostalgia (Pozza 2016). The bombing is, however, eminently important, since it is the departure point for all the main themes of the book. Moreover, it is another explosion, in the same cafe, that concludes the novel. Once again, the narrator miraculously escapes death, but the bomb kills the girl and with her, every hope she represented for the boy.

It is ultimately a story about the impossibility of belonging to any place, to any culture, to any history. Devoid of any specific geographical frame and with only rare references to Indian culture (mostly culinary and musical references), the novel aims to represent the global, contemporary world. Geetanjali Shree herself makes this explicit in an article she wrote about her novel and her own tentative translation of it:

> This novel is not narrowly culture-specific. It belongs anywhere, to a contemporary pain. It deals with terrorism, which is global, ubiquitous, like the market. (Shree 2010b: 275)

The novel, steeped in the young history of this century and its ubiquitous terrorism, can be seen as a story of absence, of the void – *but* a void imbued with potential – and of the lack of permanent and fixed roots.[3] The following passage, close to the end of the novel, represents a good example both of the idea of uncertainty and instability, and of the style of the text:

> There is certainly a return, but to nowhere, and this nowhere is the only somewhere, because there are no roots anywhere, we are the roots, where we

[3] Although KhJ does not, strictly speaking, deal with terrorism, the way it focuses on the life and feelings of the adopted son echoes one of the theses put forward by Appelbaum and Paknadel (2008: 415) in their comprehensive study of a thousand English-language novels written between 1970 and 2001, in which terrorism is, in one way or the other, present as a topic: "The story of terrorism in such novels is not the story of violence planned and exacted, but the tale of a disruption [...]. It is as much a story of something missing or taken away—a continuity in everyday life, a familiar landmark, the life of a loved one—as it is a story of assertive aggression. Indeed, [...] for most novels it is the disruption that is decisive. And so it is not the terrorism that is fully present in the novel, but terrorism's effects." On terrorism and KhJ, see Soni and Baghel (2009).

> stand, speechless, not knowing whether the return here or the departure there is the true return.[4]

Moreover, the very idea of fragmentation is constitutive of the novel, since it is present in all aspects of the book: (a) first, in the content (i.e. the bomb explosion and the boy's quest for a stable identity); (b) second, in the form of the narrative, with its unique syntax and its play on sounds and words; (c) and, finally, in the structure of the novel itself, which is divided into eighty-seven short chapters over 244 pages.[5]

It is therefore obvious that all these semantic and syntactic features are to be seriously considered when one decides to translate such a poetic narrative. Attempting, in response to the difficulties raised by the Hindi version, to smooth the translated version to make it easier to read would certainly represent a kind of betrayal of the text, and for sure would be grist to the mill of the famous saying "traduttore, traditore". But then, which translational strategy should be adopted, and which solutions to the many challenges posed by this Hindi novel should we seek?

2. Some introductory notes on the language and rhythm of the novel

From the very first reading of KhJ, I was struck by the particular rhythm of the novel, by its 'poetic' nature. I felt that its dynamic, punchy style was capital to the right understanding and appreciation of the text, to the fact that the message of the text was not to be limited to its semantic content. On the contrary, the division of the paragraphs, the syntax, and the sounds of the words, their musicality, are all features that demonstrate the need to take into consideration all the aspects of the text. In the author's own words (expressed during a conference in Lausanne), this can be summarized thus: "For me it's not so much what I write about, as how I write anything, something" (Pozza and Shree 2016). Echoing this statement, the famous French translator and linguist Henri Meschonnic had written that, with regard to

[4] *Lauṭā zarūr jātā hai par kahīṁ nahīṁ aur kahīṁ nahīṁ hī hai kahīṁ, kyoṁki jaṛ kahīṁ nahīṁ hotī, ham hī jaṛ hote haiṁ jahāṁ hote haiṁ, khaṛe avāk ki idhar lauṭeṁ to lauṭnā yā udhar cal deṁ to?* (Shree 2010a: 209). Unless otherwise stated all English and French translations are mine.

[5] This pervasive idea of fragmentation is, however, already present in *Hamārā śahar us bars* (1998). On this novel, see Consolaro 2010, and especially pages 120–125 for the topic of fragmentation. On the question of (cultural) translation and identity in connection to Geetanjali Shree's novel *Mai*, see Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère and Sareen (2014).

rhythm, it is necessary to "translate what words do not say, but what they do".[6] And not only what they do to the reader, but also what they can do to the author: "language tricks – blackmails! – me more than I construct it" (Pozza and Shree 2016). Shree summarizes the writing process thus: "When you write you are playing games, you are creating something, you don't just go straight" (Consolaro 2007: 126).

It was therefore essential to find the right tone, style, and an appropriate rhythm, in order to reproduce – or, rather, recreate – the originality of the Hindi text and to make the French translation as lively as the Hindi original.[7] In other words, I felt it necessary to listen to the rhythm and the "discourse"[8] of KhJ and its specificity within the Hindi language in order to keep present, or even visible, the double "relation" (Fr. *rapport*) that exists between, first, the reader and the original work, and second, the discourse of that work and the language in which it is written. In Meschonnic's terms:

> The relation shows the translation as such. [... It] is twofold: in relation to a work, which is a discourse, and in relation to what the discourse in its source language does with that language, receives constraints from it, but also invents constraints that are peculiar to that discourse, and make it recognizable.[9]

The sentences in the Hindi original are often elliptical, the lexicon fairly eclectic, and the syntax all but standardized. With regard to French standards of syntax, it was very tempting to make the translation clearer and smoother, to make it more "readable" for French readers, for fear that the text would be rejected due to its "uneasy" rhythm. However, trying to "fill out" the text and make it more explicit – when the Hindi version favours parataxis – or follow the academic rules of French syntax – for instance, by avoiding disjointed sentences and repetitions, frequent in Hindi but generally avoided in French – would have been a mistake. The translation would have lost both the originality and the intrinsic link between content and form of the Hindi

[6] "Traduire ce que les mots ne disent pas, mais ce qu'ils font" (Meschonnic 1995: 514).

[7] On the creative dimension of translation, see Bassnett (2016).

[8] "Discourse", in contrast with "text", "refers to the whole act of communication involving production and comprehension, not necessarily entirely verbal" (Bloor and Bloor 2013: 7).

[9] "Le rapport montre la traduction comme telle. [... Il] est double: rapport à une œuvre, qui est un discours, et rapport à ce que le discours dans sa langue de départ fait de cette langue, en reçoit de contraintes mais aussi lui invente des contraintes qui sont seulement à lui, et qui le font reconnaître" (Meschonnic 1999: 95).

version. It would certainly have been smoother, but less relevant and less challenging – which seems, at times, to be the case with the English translation (Shree 2011).[10]

Thus, the challenge of this translation was to be able to reproduce the specific rhythm of KhJ, while making the French version "faithful" and readable. Geetanjali Shree perfectly describes this challenging task in her aforementioned article on translation and writing:

> it has a rhythm of its own that I am struggling to translate. Already expressed eclectically, even borrowing from non-Hindi and non-English tongues, what variety of tongues do I introduce in the English translation and in which arrangement? A repeated eclecticism, I fear, can sound gimmicky, but without that play with tongues and rhythms it might become a "poodle"! (Shree 2010b: 275)

In order to retain and reproduce as far as possible the peculiarity of the Hindi version, its twists and turns, I have been careful in translating it into French to keep in mind the following features:[11]

- the frequent use of iterations and alliterations, consonances and assonances, as well as onomatopoeia;
- the elaborate syntax of the text, for which the standard, expected order of words is constantly reorganized and contradicted, thus making the orality of the text, as well as the unspoken and silences in it, particularly important;
- the alternation between extremely short sentences – sometimes limited to a phrase or even a single word – and very long sentences, covering several lines, resembling a soliloquy;
- the segmentation of sentences, and the strong presence of punctuation marks;
- the repetition of privileged and salient words, in direct connection with the "explosive" subject matter of the novel;
- and the presence of snippets of songs, hymns, or Urdu poetry.

[10] In this paper the English translation of Shree's novel by Nivedita Menon is used from time to time to compare with the French. However, this comparison should not be seen as diminishing the value of Menon's work. Its sole purpose here is to show the different ways one can translate the text and its rhythm. There is also a German translation, *Im leeren Raum* (2018), by Georg Lechner and Nivedita Menon, which I was not able to consult before writing this article.

[11] These features can be classified into four levels of analysis (Pekkanen 2014: 144): phonological (onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, etc.), lexical (words, syllables, salient terms, etc.), syntactic (phrases, clauses, paragraphs, etc.), and semantic (content, prominence given to various content elements, etc.).

Many of these features are illustrated in the examples that follow and all of them are essential to understanding the challenges I faced in translating KhJ. However, if these features are all more or less directly related to the question of rhythm and its translation, their enumeration and presence in the excerpts that follow does not mean that they constitute a definition in itself of what is or should necessarily be 'rhythm'. They are used here to illustrate the style of the novel and the choices I made in translating it.

Before moving onto the excerpts, a final remark to clarify the position I adopted while translating this particular novel with regard to the question of the "effect" of a text on its readers. In the process of translation, the work of the translator depends on what the text he or she is translating can say and do to him or her, and not on the intentions the author had, presumably, in mind or wanted to create. The task of the translator, in this case, is to identify and "recreate" the rhythms he or she feels while reading the original. Differences in perception necessarily occur between the author and his or her translator – not to mention those among readers. Otherwise, if only one "true" perception or only one "right" rhythm was to be found while reading a text, it would mean that there is only one possible effect – which is clearly as absurd as saying that a text has only one true meaning![12]

3. From Hindi to French: some examples

3.1. Excerpt I: chapter 33

This excerpt alone contains almost all of the above-mentioned features: short and snappy words, consonances, repetitions, plays on word order, an excerpt from a hymn, truncated sentences. It contains four paragraphs of unequal length. Both the Hindi original (in transliteration) and my French translation are given below, followed by explanations of my translation choices.

[12] Meschonnic (1999: 146) warns us of the desire to seek *the* effect (in the singular) of a text and to reproduce it in the translation: "If we try to put the equivalent, no longer in the meaning, but in the effect, we enter into an untenable pseudo-pragmatism. Since, besides reducing the meaning to the effect, which is a mistake, no one can know what this effect was first on an original addressee. And on each addressee." (Si on tente de mettre l'équivalent, non plus dans le sens, mais dans l'effet, on entre dans un pseudo-pragmatisme intenable. Puisque, outre la réduction du sens à l'effet, qui est une erreur, nul ne peut savoir ce qu'était d'abord cet effet sur un destinataire d'origine. Et sur chaque destinataire.)

> *Ek ghaṭnā. Vahī sab kuch.*
>
> *Tumhīṁ ho mātā pitā tumhīṁ ho ! Tumhīṁ ho bandhu sakhā tumhīṁ ho !*
>
> *Ghaṭnā jo bace hue jīvan jaise kuch kī cālak aur pālak. Ghaṭnā jisne de diyā rūpak bār bār dohrāne ko. Vahī coṭ, vahī śiddat, vahī bas hai honā, usse kam kuch nahīṁ honā, usse kam kuch kā nahīṁ honā, usse kam kuch nahīṁ kā honā !*
>
> *Sabūt hai gar sabūt kā sabūt na māṁgo. Bāp hamāre. Ṭukṛe ṭukṛe unkā baccā aur ṭūṭ gae unke ṭukṛoṁ ke āpas ke tār. Uṛ gae ṭukṛe aur uṛan chū kanaikśan ! Jīne kī cāh ṭukṛe ṭukṛe. Kabhī ve is ṭukṛe meṁ, kabhī usmeṁ, jo sāre juṛ jāte to ban jātā pūrā ādmī.* (Shree 2010a: 93)

> Un incident. Qui dit tout.
>
> *C'est toi ma mère mon père c'est toi ! C'est toi mon parent mon ami c'est toi !*
>
> Un incident qui conduit et nourrit le reste d'un semblant de vie. Un incident qui a créé cette allégorie, sans cesse répétée. C'est cette blessure, c'est cette intensité, c'est cela qui est, qui doit être, moins que cela c'est n'être rien, moins que cela c'est ne pas être, moins que cela c'est n'être rien qui soit !
>
> La preuve existe, si tu ne demandes la preuve de la preuve. Notre père. Brisé cassé son fils, brisés aussi les liens qui liaient ses parts à lui. Envolés les fragments, volatilisée la relation ! L'envie de vivre brisée cassée. Lui parfois dans ce fragment-ci, parfois dans celui-là, tous ces fragments qui, rassemblés, formeraient un être complet. (Shree 2018: 106)

(i) In the first line, I wanted to keep the brevity of the two utterances and retain the punctuation in order to make it a kind of heading, as it is in the Hindi. These two utterances contain mainly plosive consonants, adding to the dynamic and explosive rhythm of the line. To keep both the meaning *and* the rhythm, I translated them as "Un incident. Qui dit tout." It seems to me more faithful to the Hindi than the approach taken by the English translation, which ignores the full stop and adds the determiner "my" for extra clarification: "One incident and that becomes my everything." (Shree 2011: 81).

(ii) In the second line, there were several aspects to maintain in order to keep both the meaning and the musicality of the hymn: (a) the repetition, twice, of *tumhīṁ ho* (you are), with the enclitic *hī* stress on the pronoun *tum* (you), and the rhythmic effect emphasized by the chiasmus in both sentences; (b) the consonance, present in the /tā/ of *mātā pitā*, which I reproduced with the /ère/ of *mère* (mother) and *père* (father); and (c) the proximity of the two pairs of names (*mātā pitā* and *bandhu sakhā*). Of course, the melody that may arise in the mind of

the Hindi-speaking reader, who is expected to know this very popular hymn,[13] cannot arise in the same way in the mind of the French-speaking reader. Nevertheless, what matters here is the possibility that some melody emerges in his or her mind.

(iii) In the third paragraph, the first two clauses start with the word *ghaṭnā* (incident), which is already present in the first paragraph, and thus becomes very insistent. Although no article precedes it, unlike in the first paragraph, I preferred to repeat the form "Un incident", used in the first line, in order to echo this insistence. Since the Hindi text is inexplicit with regard to whose rest of life it is (*bace hue jīvan*), I have chosen to follow the Hindi version and keep this ambiguity alive. Even if it can be assumed that it is the narrator's life, I preferred to use the expression "un semblant de vie" (a semblance of life), contrary to the English translation, which makes it explicit by adding the determiner "my": "The incident that becomes the driver and keeper of the rest of my life. The incident that provides the metaphor thereafter for everything in my life." (Shree 2011: 81).

In the same two sentences, the consonance created by the three words ending with the suffix *-ak* (*cālak* 'driver', *pālak* 'keeper', and *rūpak* 'allegory') has been reproduced in French with an assonance based on the words *conduit*, *nourrit*, and *allégorie*. Even if this results in a change of category for the first two terms (two verbs instead of two agent nouns), I preferred to use a verbal form, lighter and more explosive, and therefore closer to the Hindi, than the French equivalent suffix *-eur* (*conducteur, protecteur*), too heavy in this case. These words (*conduit*, *nourrit*) also allowed me to keep the double syllable of the Hindi words.

Furthermore, the very idea of repetition is highlighted in three complementary ways in the second clause of this paragraph:

(a) by the explicit presence of the verb dohrānā (to repeat);

(b) by the verb collocation with the adverbial phrase bār bār (again and again); and

(c) by the shifting of dohrānā to the end of the sentence, with the stress implied by this clause-final position.

Repetition in this paragraph is again stressed by the iterative presence of the emphatic pronoun *vahī* (that very), which is followed by the triple presence of the phrase *usse kam* (less than that). In the second part of this sentence, each clause reveals a slight change in meaning due only to

[13] So popular in fact that it was the main song in the movie *Maiṅ cup rahūṅgī* (1962), sung by Lata Mangeshkar.

the postposition *kā* (of), which appears in the second clause hereafter and changes position in the third: *usse kam kuch nahīṁ honā, usse kam kuch kā nahīṁ honā, usse kam kuch nahīṁ kā honā*, which becomes in French, "moins que cela c'est n'être rien, moins que cela c'est ne pas être, moins que cela c'est n'être rien qui soit!"

(iv) The fourth and last paragraph of this excerpt contains essentially plosive consonants; note too the recurrence of the word *ṭukṛe* (pieces, fragments), containing the retroflex flap /ṛ/. All these explosive sounds thus perfectly echo the repetition of the word *ṭukṛe* and the idea of explosion that it connotes. In the translation, it was essential to reproduce this "sound picture", which emphasizes the idea of explosion and fragmentation, underlined by the nature of the phonemes, as well as by the brevity, repetition, and meaning of the word *ṭukṛe.* As a result, I favoured the adjectival pair "brisé cassé" (broken broken) instead of the corresponding nouns "morceaux" and "fragments", less expressive and less explosive. In the second part of this sentence (*ṭūṭ gae unke ṭukṛoṁ ke āpas ke tār*), I also tried to reproduce the succession of brief Hindi words by equally short words and alliterations in French: "brisés aussi les liens qui liaient ses parts à lui".

3.2. Excerpt II: chapter 72

In this chapter, the narrator examines the question of potential versus concrete achievements of a life, depending on the way one looks at it, namely either from the perspective of the past – in this case when the boy was eighteen years old and everything still seemed possible – or from the perspective of the present – once the tragic events described in the book have taken place. The whole purpose of this chapter is to compare the potentialities of the past, the 'then', *tab* in Hindi (*alors* in French), with the results – either concrete or left latent – of the present, the 'now,' *ab* in Hindi (*maintenant* in French). An analogy is also made with the potentialities of the English language in a postcolonial context and what can be gained from it.

> *Āzmāyā tarīqā hai islie batā rahā hūṁ iskī diqqateṁ. Ek, fel hone kā cāns hai. Dūsre, sāṁs phūlne kā. Fel end phūl. To kis lāyaq ?*
>
> *Dūsrā tarīqā behtar hai ki samajh lo ek chor hai, ek hor hai ! Kahānī kā, jīvan kā, aṁgrezī kā. Is chor se kahoge to ab kahoge, hor chor se kahoge to tab kahoge. Tab kaho to sab honevālā hai, ab kaho to sab ho cukā hai. Tab paṅkh aur uṛān, ab bād-e-tūfān !* (Shree 2010a : 200)

> C'est une méthode éprouvée, c'est pourquoi je peux parler de ses problèmes. Primo, il y a des chances que ça échoue. Deusio, qu'on se retrouve essoufflé. Échouer et s'essouffler. À quoi bon alors ?
>
> L'autre méthode est meilleure, celle de considérer qu'il y a deux bouts, deux buts. Dans une histoire, dans la vie, en anglais. Parle de ce bout-ci et tu diras « maintenant », « dès lors », mais parle de ce bout-là et tu diras « alors ». Dis « alors » et tout est à venir, dis « dès lors » et tout est accompli. « Alors » a des ailes et s'envole, « dès lors » a des airs de tempête et s'époumone ! (Shree 2018: 229–230)

In the first paragraph, there is a nice double echo between two pairs of words: first, between *cāns* (from the English 'chance') and *sāṁs* (breath); secondly, between *fel hone* (from the English 'to fail') and *phūlne* (to swell, or to gasp, to be breathless, when joined to *sāṁs*), a pair that is repeated in the next sentence (*Fel end phul*). I have tried to reproduce this double echo by playing on the repetition of the fricatives /ch/ (ʃ) and /s/ on the one hand, and on the repetition of the French phoneme /ou/ (u) on the other hand: "Primo, il y a des chances que ça échoue. Deusio, qu'on se retrouve essoufflé. Échouer et s'essouffler."

In the second paragraph, Geetanjali Shree introduces a new play on words with the terms *chor* (end, extremity, edge, border) and *hor*, of Punjabi origin, meaning 'more, other'.[14] Literally, the Hindi sentence *samajh lo ek chor hai, ek hor hai !* means 'considers that there is one end, and one more'. An English translation could have played with the words 'one shore and one more'.[15] For the French version, it was more difficult. How was I going to reproduce the original play on words in order to keep *both* its sound and sense effects? After many attempts, I eventually chose to replace the assonance /o/ in *chor* and *hor* with the alliteration /b/ in *bouts* (end) and *buts* (aim): "L'autre méthode est meilleure, celle de considérer qu'il y a deux bouts, deux buts."

The text, however, introduces a second play on words in this paragraph. This time it plays on the alternation between the two temporal notions of the past and the present, thanks to the echo of the corresponding Hindi words: *tab* (then) and *ab* (now). Such a play had to find an equivalent solution in French by playing on the sound similarity of the two words, but also, if possible, on their brevity. After several attempts and hesitations (especially for the second term), I came to the solution of *alors* (for *tab*) and *dès lors* (for *ab*). I am aware that *dès lors* (from

[14] It can also be a poetic form of *or* (direction, side, end); one finds in particular the collocation *or-chor* for 'one end and the other' or 'beginning and end'. However, the author confirmed with me that she had the Punjabi word in mind.

[15] The published English translation preferred not to follow this path and chose the more literal translation: "understand that there is one end and then one more" (Shree 2011: 193).

then on) is not exactly equivalent to 'now'; this is why I found it necessary to add in juxtaposition, where the first occurrence of *dès lors* appears in the paragraph, the word *maintenant* (now). In an earlier version, I had opted for the adverb *ores*, which is semantically close to *ab*, but which seemed too archaic for this text – and whose meaning I doubted would be easily understood by each and every reader.

The last two sentences of the paragraph each reproduce the same echo process with an almost identical number of syllables in each of their two clauses and with the strong presence of rhymes in Hindi. As these two sentences are perfect examples of the particular rhythm and musicality of this text, I had to recreate something similar in the French, something that would sound a bit like a jingle: "Dis 'alors' et tout est à venir, dis 'dès lors' et tout est accompli. 'Alors' a des ailes et s'envole, 'dès lors' a des airs de tempête et s'époumone !"

The English version provides in this context another fine example of a perfectly relevant translation, but one that clearly favours the semantic point of view – including some additions to clarify the meaning of the last sentence – rather than the phonetic aspects of the text: "Say it then, and it is yet to be; say it now and it has been already. *Then* has wings and flight and hope, *now* lies crushed in the aftermath of the storm!" (Shree 2011: 193).

3.3. Excerpt III: chapter 13

In chapter 13, the narrator wonders what his place is in this house, and whether he even has a life of his own, independent of the life of "the other", the dead son. The first paragraph is striking for its density and is characterized by the following three aspects:

(a) all sentences are interrogative – even if there is no question mark at the end of the first one; it is therefore essential to keep the questioning tone of this passage and the uncertainty that characterizes it, all the more since the last word of this paragraph is the marker of interrogation *kyā* (what?);

(b) structurally, three short sentences, one line each in the original text, are followed by a fourth and final sentence that covers five lines; there is thus a strong difference to be respected between the first three sentences and the last; and

(c) the final sentence, although very long, is marked by a dynamic – and jerky too – tempo; it is the result of a double iterative effect, achieved by the succession of very short, often monosyllabic words, and by the repeated use of closed vowels (*i*, *ī*, *īṁ*, *e*, and *eṁ*).

> *To ghar merā yā uskā aur maiṁ aur merā jīvan yā vah aur uskā. Bāt uljhāne kā śauq nahīṁ hai par aur kahūṁ to kaise kahūṁ ? Marzī bhī mānūṁ to kyā cunūṁ—apne tīn bars yā uske aṭṭhārah ? Bas vahīṁ kahīṁ bīc meṁ calīṁ merī sāṁseṁ aur māṁ aur bāp kī aur uskī to nahīṁ phir bhī sārī usī kī aur sarak phisal saṁbhal jā mar meṁ kaun jāne maiṁ tīn kā huā yā aṭṭhārah kā aur yah to pakke taur par nahīṁ patā ki jis din bam phūṭā aur ham donoṁ chiṭke maiṁ sābut vah parkhace vah din uskā janamdin hai yā mṛtyutithi aur merī bhī kyā ?* (Shree 2010a: 39)

> Alors cette maison la mienne ou la sienne et s'agit-il de moi et de ma vie ou de lui et de sa vie ? Je n'aime pas compliquer les choses, mais comment dire cela autrement ? Même si je pouvais choisir, que choisirais-je : mes trois ans ou ses dix-huit ? Bon c'est quelque part ici que je vis et Maman et Papa aussi mais pas lui bien sûr et pourtant tout vient de lui et dans ce rampement glissement redressement anéantissement qui sait si j'avais trois ans ou dix-huit et impossible de savoir pour sûr si le jour où la bombe a explosé et qu'on a été dispersé moi entier lui en pièces c'est l'anniversaire de sa naissance ou de sa mort et pour moi quid ? (Shree 2018: 44)

The aim here was, first, to respect as much as possible the respective proportion in length of the sentences (respectively, fourteen, twelve, and twelve words for the first three sentences, and seventy words for the fourth), and secondly, to reproduce one of the effects of the last sentence, that of a feeling of dizziness, because of the many questions and words following one another at a very sustained pace.

Since there is no punctuation in the last sentence, except for the final question mark, the repeated presence of coordinating conjunctions – particularly *aur* (and) – plays a key role in instilling this frenetic rhythm. Out of the seventy words of this sentence, there are seven *aur* and two *yā* (or) – already in the first sentence of this paragraph, out of the fourteen words there are three *aur* and two *yā*. Even if the comma is much less used in Hindi than in French, its total absence in this very long sentence – a structure that is found several times in the book – must be respected in the French too; the risk being that it would otherwise lose this repetitive, whirling effect.

Within the paragraph, consonances and assonances especially also play an important role in the melody and rhythm of the text, as in *aur uskī to nahīṁ phir bhī sārī usī kī aur sarak phisal saṁbhal jā mar meṁ*, which becomes "mais pas lui bien sûr et pourtant tout vient de lui et dans ce rampement glissement redressement anéantissement".

In this case, contrary to the other excerpts, the English exercises quite a bit of freedom on several points and unfortunately misses the hypnotic and frenetic rhythm of the Hindi text. This

results from the addition of commas, and especially from the splitting into two sentences of the last and long Hindi sentence – and even by the eviction of a part of the Hindi version!

> Somewhere amongst it all beats my pulse and my parents' and not his of course, but the throb of each pulse is his, really. And no one knows for sure about the day the bomb exploded and the two of us were scattered, I whole and he in pieces, whether that day was my birthday or his deathday. (Shree 2011: 29)

3.4. Excerpt IV: chapter 37

In this chapter the narrator tries to banish the past and live in the present. However, the "ghost" of the other son still haunts both his room and the house. In the following excerpt, like in the previous one, what strikes us first is the presence of a very long sentence (nine lines in the original text). The rhythm, however, is different. In this excerpt, what dominates is the stream of consciousness that gives to the paragraph its specificity. The sentence is only slightly interrupted by the repeated presence of the conjunction *aur* (and), which gives to this stream of consciousness a particular rhythm and breathing.

> *Nīṁd merī khāl utār detī hai. Maiṁ bhūle se sone lagtā hūṁ jab aṁdhiyār mere kamre ko gaṭak jātā hai aur pās kā saṃsār mar jātā hai aur dūr gāṛiyoṁ kī āvāz aur kuttoṁ kā kikiyānā dhartī ke bhītar gahrī gahrī marmar sī karāte haiṁ aur maiṁ bhī usī meṁ dafan hotā jā rahā hūṁ aur tab nikaltā hai kuch yā koī cīṁṭiyoṁ ko mulamme kī tarah oṛhe aur phir vahī khurc khurc merī soī khāl chīlne lagtī hai aur merī sāṁseṁ aṭakne lagtī haiṁ aur lagtā hai mujhe maiṁ kisī sandūqce meṁ band hūṁ aur zarā zarā zarrā zarrā bikhar gayā hūṁ. Sūt sūt cīṁṭiyāṁ mujhe maṭiyāmeṭ kare ḍāl rahī haiṁ aur dhaṛ dhaṛ dhaṛ dhaṛ dhaṛ maiṁ uṭhtā hūṁ sannāṭī rātoṁ meṁ.* (Shree 2010a: 105–106)

> Le sommeil m'écorche. Si par mégarde je m'endors quand l'obscurité engloutit ma chambre et que le monde environnant meurt et que de loin me parviennent le bruit des voitures et le hurlement des chiens comme un grondement émanant des tréfonds de la terre où je sombre à mon tour alors elle apparaît la chose couverte de fourmis comme d'une cape et là recommence le scratch scratch scratch qui se met à peler ma peau endormie et mon souffle s'arrête et l'impression me vient d'être enfermé dans une boîte et de me disperser en de toutes petites et minuscules particules. Fil après fil les fourmis me désagrègent et mon cœur cogne boum boum boum boum je me lève en sursaut dans le silence de mort de ces nuits. (Shree 2018: 120–121)

The essential feature of the long intermediate sentence is its lack of punctuation. However, the repeated presence of the conjunction *aur* gives the impression, while reading the text, of an obsessive, heady, almost bewitching rhythm. In this respect, it seemed essential to keep this conjunction and to reproduce its effect, despite the great aversion in the French language to this kind of repetition.

Due to this reluctance in French to repeat the conjunction *et* (and), I had initially opted for the use of the semicolon, thinking that this would also make a better distinction between the different images mentioned in the paragraph. However, the rhythm of thought and images that jostle in the narrator's head seemed more important to me than the strict rules of the French language and the clarity of the description. Therefore, I chose finally to use the conjunction *et* in order to respect this stream of consciousness and the slight breathlessness that follows.

I have also tried to reproduce the consonance of the phoneme /r/, made especially prominent by the onomatopoeic *khurc khurc* (which expresses scratching, itching), both by the sound and by the mental image created when reading it. The repeated use of the alveolar /r/ also makes it possible to concretize the noise – in this case, frightening – of the street, of cars, of dogs barking: "de loin me parviennent le bruit des voitures et le hurlement des chiens comme un grondement émanant des tréfonds de la terre". Of course, plays on words and alliterations, for instance, cannot systematically be reproduced identically in French. Sometimes I had to choose other sounds to show the presence of an alliteration, for example at the end of the intermediate sentence, where the Hindi has *zarā zarā zarrā zarrā bikhar gayā hūṁ*, literally "a little a little atom atom I have been scattered". To reproduce the notions of tininess and scattered things, while retaining the repetition of identical sounds, I replaced the alliteration with similar endings, playing with the echo of the words *minuscules* (tiny) and *particules* (particle), emphasized also by the phrase *toutes petites* which precedes: "me disperser en de toutes petites et minuscules particules".

4. Conclusion

A translation that focuses first and foremost on the semantic content of the text would certainly have been able to convey its general meaning – this is what the English version has done successfully. However, giving special attention to the word sequences, to the rhythm of the sentences, and to their distinctive sonority, was essential if I was to translate the poetic, extra-semantic, and almost sensory nature of the Hindi text. Thus, it is only when I started to pay

careful attention to every aspect of the rhythm of the text, to the way things are said – and "sung" – in it, to consider both the meaning and effect of the words, and not only the grammar, that I felt I was able to reach an additional, deeper layer of meaning. It was when I was able to feel the textured surface of the text, with its protuberances and troughs, relief and depth, that I was able to give the French translation a particular texture, capable of evoking the unique light of the Hindi text.

This is not to say that the result of the first version of my translation, primarily based on the semantic content, betrayed the message of the text or contained serious mistakes. But it was, as it were, a different novel that I had translated. To understand the difference between the two versions, one can use an analogy with the paintings of the famous French artist Pierre Soulages. My first translation corresponded more or less to a photocopy of a painting by Soulages, whereas the aim – in his case in particular, but with any painting and text too – was to make a three-dimensional, material reproduction of the original work. In the work both of Soulages and Geetanjali Shree, texture is an integral part of the creative process, and must therefore be recreated and made visible – audible too, since Geetanjali Shree's novel benefits significantly from being read aloud.

Let me conclude with two short quotations, sharing each in its own way this idea of the importance of texture in a text and its translation. The first is borrowed from Marie Nadia Karsky's introduction to her edited book *Traduire le rythme* (2014: 23), where she writes (in French) that any translation "should make it possible to push back the boundaries of what is considered 'possible' in a language, so that it can accommodate traces of the source language". The second quotation brings us back to the author of KhJ, who wrote in her paper "Writing Is Translating Is Writing Is Translating Is…":

> Literature is always more than its content. It is structure, it is texture, it is cadence, it is rhythm, it is cultural codes and bondings that form a community, it is a text pulsating with and in its context. (Shree 2010b: 275)

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